Postsecondary National Policy Institute

Veteran Students in Higher Education

CENSUS OVERVIEW

According to the U.S. Census’ American Community Survey (ACS), in 2022, 6.2% of the population aged 18 and over were veterans of the U.S. military. Of those veterans, 26.3% served September 2001 or later, 24.5% served between August 1990 and September 2001, 33.6% are veterans of the Vietnam War era, 4.1% were veterans of the Korean War era, and 0.8% were veterans of World War II. Ten percent of veterans were female. White non-Hispanic people were the most represented racial/ethnic group among veterans at 74%, compared to 12.4% Black or African American, 8.6% Hispanic or Latino of any race, 7.5% reporting two or more races, and 2.8% reporting a race/ethnicity not listed. For individuals aged 25 or over, 31.6% of veterans held a bachelor’s degree or higher compared to 35.9% of nonveterans.

ENROLLMENT

Unless otherwise noted, enrollment data in this section come from the National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey (NPSAS), academic year 2019-20.

- **3.7%** of undergraduates were veterans.
  - 2.8% of public 4-year, 2.9% of private nonprofit 4-year, 4.3% of public 2-year, and 7.5% of for-profit institution enrollments were veterans.

- Veteran students were **twice as likely** to attend for-profit institutions and slightly more likely to attend public 2-year institutions than the national average.
  - 12.6% of veterans attended for-profit institutions, compared to 6.2% of all students
  - 33.7% attended public 2-year institutions, compared to 29.3% of all students

- **3.8%** of students enrolled at minority-serving institutions (MSIs) were veterans, while 3.6% of students enrolled at non-MSIs were veterans.
  - While **1%** of veteran students enrolled at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU), a similar rate as nonveterans, 15.5% of veterans attended Black-serving non-HBCU institutions compared to 9.5% of nonveteran students.

- **63%** of veteran students were aged 30 or older, compared to 19% of non-veteran students.

- **7.5%** of Native American, 4.4% of students reporting more than one race, 4.6% of Black, 4.2% of white, 3.8% of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 2.4% of Hispanic or Latino, and 1.7% of Asian students were veterans.

FINANCIAL AID

- According to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 484,406 students received Post-9/11 GI Bill Financial Benefits, while 223,959 students received Department of Defense (DOD) Tuition Assistance Program benefits in the 2020-21 academic year.\(^1\)
  - The average Post-9/11 GI Bill benefit was $10,358 and the average DOD Tuition Assistance was $2,169.

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\(^1\) Students may qualify for both programs, so there is likely overlap. These figures were calculated by the authors.
According to the NPSAS, 44.3% of veteran students received some form of federal Title IV financial aid in the 2019-20 academic year other than GI Bill or DOD benefits, compared to 55.4% of nonveteran students.

- A similar share of veteran and nonveteran students received a Pell grant (38.2% vs. 40.3%).
- 20.9% of veteran students received a federal student loan, compared to 35% of nonveteran students.

Among veteran students who received federal Title IV aid, the average amount of all federal aid received was $7,394, compared to $8,761 for nonveteran students.

- The average Pell grant amount was $3,904 for veteran students, compared to $4,128 for nonveteran students.
- The average Federal student loan amount for veteran students was $8,026, compared to $8,574 for nonveteran students.

COMPLETION/DEGREE ATTAINMENT

According to the Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS) study, among students who first enrolled in the 2011-12 academic year, 16.9% of veteran students had attained a bachelor’s degree by 2017, compared to 37.1% of nonveteran students.

- 52% of veteran students had attained no degree or certificate, compared to 43.7% of nonveteran students.

Among all students who had attained a bachelor’s degree by 2017, less than 1% were veteran students.

EARNINGS AND WEALTH

According to the Baccalaureate & Beyond study, ten years after receiving a bachelor’s degree, veteran graduates who reported having an income averaged a gross income of $79,371, compared to the average of $76,293 for nonveteran students.

Wealth accumulation can be measured differently from income. Ten years after graduating:

- 73.7% of veteran graduates reported owning a home, compared to 62.4% of nonveteran graduates.
- 87.3% of veteran graduates had some form of a retirement account, similar to nonveteran graduates.

POPULATION-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

In 2013, student veterans reported investing less time outside of the classroom on activities not essential to the completion of their coursework due to parenting responsibilities or work.

DATA SOURCES